DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 119 506 FL 007 501

AUTHOR Tinsley, Royal L., Jr.
TITLE Translation and Foreign Language Teaching.
PUB DATE 1 Nov 75
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Arizona Foreign Language Association (November 1, 1975)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage
DESCRIPTORS *Attitudes; *College Language Programs; Degrees (Titles); Higher Education; Interpreters; Language Enrollment; *Language Instruction; Language Skills; *Language Teachers; Second Language Learning; *Translation

ABSTRACT

Translators and teachers of foreign languages need each other: translators need formal academic training and recognition and teachers of foreign languages need students. Unfortunately, translators know only too well that most FL teachers are not competent translators, and FL Departments generally consider translation as an activity beneath the dignity of scholars. This mutual contempt must be overcome so that translators can obtain the benefit of formal training and an academic degree, FL Departments the benefit of increased enrollments, and the overall quality of translation in this country raised to the level found in most other nations. Close examination of the translation process shows that it can be described justifiably as scholarly, intellectual, artistic, and even creative, quite apart from its obvious career aspects. There are many cogent arguments for awarding undergraduate or graduate degrees in translation, as is the practice in most other countries. (Author)

****
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. Nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
****

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

ED119500

FL007501

TRANSLATION AND FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING

by

Royal L. Tinsley, Jr.

There are several reasons why translation has not been offered in the foreign language departments of U.S. colleges and universities as a program of study culminating in a professional career, and several reasons why consideration should be given now to establishing a limited number of degree programs in translation and interpretation (oral translation), preferably at the graduate level.

The major objection to accepting translation as an academic discipline seems to be based on the attitude that it is a skill, a "craft" devoid of true intellectual challenge, originality, and creativity--an activity that anyone with conversational or reading competence in two or more languages can perform with facility and virtually automatically. This is the same attitude that has plagued the teaching of language skills for so many years.

Certainly the ability to read the source language with complete understanding and to write the target language with great fluency are prerequisites to competent translation, but much more is involved. The translator must also know the subject matter, whether cultural, historical, mythological, or technical, and be able to transpose the *ideas* --NOT THE WORDS--of the source text into the appropriate style and terminology of the target language. The ability to speak, read, and write two or more languages with native fluency is no guarantee of an

ability to translate scientific and technical texts or literature. Competence in translation requires a specific type of talent for the use of language and either training or a long apprenticeship of trial and error.

Prior to 1970 there were two academic institutions in the United States with complete programs for training translators and interpreters. Georgetown University's Department of Translation and Interpretation was established in 1949, and the T & I Department at the Monterey Institute of Foreign Studies in 1967. Stanford University initiated a translator training program in German and Russian in 1971. Since then, certificate programs have been developed at Carnegie-Mellon University, Notre Dame College, Oakland University, Queens College (CUNY), The State University of New York at Binghamton, St. Mary-of-the-Woods College, and the University of California at Santa Barbara. Stephens College in Columbia, Missouri has offered the B.A. in Translation and Interpretation for several years, and Marygrove College in Detroit awards the Associate of Arts in Translation (AAT) and the B.A. with a Translator's Certificate.

All T & I courses at the Monterey Institute and at UC Santa Barbara are at the graduate level, and the University of Puerto Rico approved the M.A. in Translation in 1972. At least twelve other institutions (including Brandeis, Brown, Rutgers, Texas at Austin, and Wisconsin) offer undergraduate and graduate courses in the theory and practice of translation. A number of graduate schools have accepted literary translations, especially with annotation and commentary, as theses for the M.A. and the Ph.D.

Like physics, chemistry, engineering, law, medicine, music, literary criticism, or teaching, all of which are skills, translation is also a skill, an art, and a science to some degree. Translation has its history, its theories, and its research aspects. Competent literary translation, for example, requires research into the original author's culture and into his use of langauge and idiom, usually at several subcultural levels of his society. It may necessitate research into historical,cultural, mythological, or even technical allusions by the author, even in a novel. Competent translation of scientific or technical texts demands a rather broad fundamental knowledge of the subject matter and a great deal of research and background reading, not only for correct terminology but because anything a translator does not understand he cannot translate well. If the alleged translator who came up with "porters of legal age" in an article on semiconductors had known anything about the subject matter he would have known his translation made no sense at all in context and would have continued to search until he found the correct translation: "majority carriers"!

Of all the activities characteristic of *Homo sapiens*, few if any are are more *intellectual* than the skillful, effective, and artistic use of language to communicate ideas from one individual or group of individuals to another. The "thinking process" itself is dependent to a considerable degree on the ability of the thinker to formulate his thoughts in words. A painting or a musical composition might conceivably be created without recourse to "words", but the painting could not be conveyed to others without the forms and colors that constitute the "language" of the painter, nor the music to those who had not heard it

without the aid of the musical notations that are "readable" to the musician. The development of a quantum theory or a theory of relativity without conscious thought in terms of language is difficult to imagine. Even the language of mathematics, universally understandable as it may be among those who "know" mathematics, is still a language, a system of symbols that by common consent convey meaning to the initiated but which, like every other language, is completely unintelligible to "non-speakers" of the language.

Without translation the great ideas of ancient civilizations that are the very foundations of Western Civilization as we know it would have been accessible only to camel drivers, sailors, itinerant merchants, and a few scholars--and only to the latter, once the ideas were written and no longer part of the oral tradition. There are always individuals who acquire communicative competence in two or more languages and thus have access to more than the total knowledge of their own culturolinguistic groups, but the number of languages any individual can master to any effective degree is relatively limited. In any case, unless these individuals transmit this "extracultural" knowledge in the form of a "re-creation"--a direct or indirect translation--into their native language its potential for enriching their own culture is never realized. Such externally acquired knowledge is simply nonexistent for the other members of what should have been the receptor culture. Thus, for all practical purposes, only translation can add a third dimension to communication and transport ideas and thoughts across linguistic barriers so that they may become part of the total knowledge and experience of persons unable to understand them in the language in which they are originally expressed.

A competent translation, then, is *a contribution to the total body of knowledge* available to the receptor culture. Despite the fact that the ideas transmitted through the translation are "original" only in the source text (assuming the source text is not itself a translation), they do not exist in the total knowledge available to all speakers of the target language until they are translated. Therefore, with reference to the language and culture for which the translation is made, the ideas are "original" in their translated form: they have been called into existence from the limbo of Babel just as surely as the original author called them forth from the limbo of his own intellect. Most of our knowledge about the wisdom of the Jews, Egyptians, Greeks, Romans, Arabs, Chinese, Hindus, and others, even of the Bible itself, has become part of our own store of knowledge only through a whole series of translations through several languages, one of the most productive paths having been from Greek into Arabic and then into Latin, and finally into the modern European languages.

Translation is a *creative art* insofar as no translation worthy of the name is ever the result of a mechanical transfer from the words of the source language into the words of the target language. The translator must understand the ideas expressed in the original text, process them through the filter of his own knowledge, experiences, emotions, etc., and then "re-create" them, together with all their connotative nuances, in the words, structures, and cultural connotations of the target language.

Translations made for British readers, for example, are often vaguely disturbing to Americans because the ideas of the original text have been "Anglicized" rather than "Americanized." The content would be the same

in either British or American English as it was in the original language, provided the translators were competent, but the effect of a translation in either idiom would be different for the two groups of readers. Furthermore, a translation of a great literary work intended for use in teaching foreign literature in English translation must meet different criteria than those applicable to a translation of the latest popular novel because the intended readers and the desired effect of the translations are different.

Depending upon the type of translation and the purpose for which it is made, the vocabulary and structure of the source language and even the style of the author must be discarded to some degree. The whole must then be created anew in the vocabulary, structure, and style appropriate to the language of the translation. A unique effect of the original author's style can often be re-created in the translation, provided the translator's command of the target language is comparable to the original author's mastery of the source langauge. Even scientific and technical texts must be re-created in the target language in a style appropriate to the subject matter and to the language of the translation.

When due consideration is given to the intellectual activity, the linguistic skills, artistic talent, and research efforts prerequisite to competence as a translator, together with the fact that several universities have recognized translation as an appropriate activity for both undergraduate and graduate students, it is clearly time for even more institutions to recognize it as a legitimate professional discipline. Translation from and into two foreign languages, if combined with a scientific or technical specialty, would entail more than enough study, skill, talent, and intellectual value to justify graduate degrees.

There is apprehension in some quarters that an academic degree in translation would further weaken the traditional liberal arts degree in the direction of a professional degree. The danger exists, to be sure, but two factors should be considered. In the first place, no one needs a broader education than a translator--he must know as much as possible about every conceivable subject, for sooner or later he will probably be required to translate a text concerning any subject under the sun. Furthermore, it is difficult to see any fundamental difference between an M.A. in Translation and an M.A. in Teaching, in Music, in Pharmacology, or even in Chemistry. A professional degree, on the other hand, analagous to a Master of Accounting or of Business Administration would not be inappropriate and would achieve the desired results.

The relative availability of opportunities for applying specific knowledge and skills in the pursuit of material wealth has never been a criterion--at least not ostensibly--for deciding whether or not to offer academic programs in any particular discipline, nor should it be, despite the current interest in "career education." It is unlikely that the number of translators will ever equal that of chemists or nuclear engineers, for example, but the present need for academically trained, competent translators of scientific and technical literature into and from English is at least as great as the need for astronomers, and the opportunities for translators must continue to increase as developing nations contribute ever more technology and literature to the total body of the world's knowledge. Among the factors that do and will contribute to the increasing need for translation are expanding world trade and the growing popularity of courses in foreign literatures in English translation. The increasing concern of all nations to preserve

their own cultures, including their langauges, will also be very important. This concern may well override any interest in a "world language" of communication, and even if English or some other natural or synthetic langauge should ever achieve universal use as the language of science and commerce, then literature, newspapers, and intranational affairs will continue to be in the vernacular, and there will always be a need to translate much of this literature into other languages.

Much progress has been made in recent years in machine translation, and it may well develop to the point where it could satisfy certain specific translation needs. Machine translation, however, is unlikely to replace human translation in the foreseeable future. It could, and probably will, relieve the human translator of many routine and time consuming mechanical operations and free him to apply his unique intellectual abilities to the essence of translation: the understanding, interpretation, and re-creation of ideas and thought processes into languages other than the one in which they had their genesis. For the time being, however, computers are performing an excellent service for human translators by serving as terminology banks.

Translators and translation are likely to be with us for a long time, and the academic training of translators could bring some semblance of order into the chaotic, hit-or-miss self-education (or lack of it) that now prevails in the profession. Not every translation is a life-or-death matter, but the potential danger from mistranslation is enormous in terms of misrepresentation of intentions and ideas, of wasted money and materials, and even in terms of the loss of liberty or of life itself. One mistranslation, fortunately detected before any

actual harm was done, assured Italian manufacturers that a certain chemical was safe enough to be used in children's food because the translator had rendered the English word *paste* with the Italian *pasta*!

The fact that translation is performed every day by hundreds of people who are more or less incompetent is no argument in favor of perpetuating the situation. Before academic training and legislation brought some degree of standardization and regulation into the training of physicians, attorneys, and other professionals these skills were practiced by self-taught "experts," some of whom were very competent and many of whom were not. Neither academic training nor legislation has completely eliminated incompetence in any profession, but they have considerably reduced the incidence of it.

Availability of degrees in translation could conceivably have a favorable effect on the unfortunate trend away from the acquisition of competence in <u>any</u> language, even in English. The refrain of "functional illiteracy" is heard ever louder and with increasing frequency. Throughout the country employers are becoming more and more vocal in their accusations that college and university graduates in all disciplines are completely incompetent to express their thoughts in language that is comprehensible to others, or even to understand written instructions. This situation is at least in part the result of the American attitude that the use of language is a natural function of the human body and brain, something everyone is born with, an inherent rather than an acquired and marketable skill. Another factor which is also economically oriented in part is the fact that Americans equate fluency in a foreign language with immigrants, those who are not-quite-American if

not downright un-American, especially with those who work at menial tasks for low wages.

This attitude that fluency in a foreign language is not a marketable skill is reinforced, unfortunately, by experience. People with some competence in two or more languages are constantly asked to translate for little or no compensation, and many of them are only too happy to show off their linguistic skills, however limited, by providing such service free of charge or at ridiculously low prices. It is all too true that anything obtainable without the sacrifice of money or tremendous effort is worthless in the opinion of most Americans, for whom value is equated with cost. Since they need not put forth the effort to acquire language skills themselves nor pay large sums of money for the use of others' linguistic competence, it is a natural assumption that competence in foreign languages is very interesting, perhaps even desirable, but not worth the expenditure of money or effort to acquire it.

The professional translator knows that such competence is worth money because his language talents are in great demand. At present, however, full-time professional translators number only a few thousand in this country, and people who know the value of competent, professional translation and are willing to pay well for it are still relatively few, mostly large multinational corporations. The granting of degrees in translation would go far toward correcting this situation by endowing the acquisition of language skills with the aura of professional and financial respectability, of practicality and "relevance" that is so important in our society, and would make the study of all languages more attractive.

From a strictly utilitarian point of view, the prospect of a degree in translation would appeal to some students who after a year or two of studying a foreign language find that they like languages, like learning to use languages effectively and artistically, but have no desire to teach literature or linguistics even if teaching positions were plentiful. Such students may have the latent talent and the interest to become translators or interpreters. Translator and interpreter training programs culminating in a degree in translation would attract many of those students who now drop their study of foreign languages as soon as they have satisfied a requirement or feel they can devote no more time to study in a field with no promise of financial advantages.

There is no logical reason for offering translator training in every foreign language department, but the knowledge that such training is available at a higher level in a relatively small number of institutions might encourage some students to continue their study of foreign languages as undergraduates and then apply to graduate schools offering advanced training for truly professional translators and interpreters.

Although there are many cogent arguments for teaching translation or interpretation as preparation for a career, there is equal justification from the viewpoint of the humanistic tradition that education should be a preparation for living rather than for earning a living. Few other activities are more conducive to an understanding of and respect for the ideas of others as well as for recognition and acceptance of one's own capabilities and limitations. The humanistic potential of excellent translation as one of the higher levels of communication, one that not only rises easily above the barriers of time and space but even above the

far more formidable barrier of linguistic and cultural differences, is sufficient reason in itself to reestablish translation as the respected scholarly activity it was when practically the entire knowledge of the western world depended upon the skills and artistry of a handful of dedicated scholar-translators in Bagdad, Toledo, and a few other centers of translation.